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SUBJECT: CZECH REPUBLIC'S ROBUST HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM

REF: PRAGUE 97 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. SUMMARY AND COMMENT: 2005 was a big year for Czech humanitarian assistance with a record total disbursement of USD 8.5 million, up from USD 2.2 million in 2004. In addition to the humanitarian assistance budget, the MFA has discretionary authority to allocate up to about USD 200,000 per project on emergency relief, in coordination with the Ministry of the Interior. The biggest humanitarian assistance projects in 2005 were Iraq reconstruction (USD 8.3 million), Pakistan earthquake relief (USD 4.6 million), Southeast Asia tsunami relief (USD 1.2 million), and U.S. Hurricane Katrina relief (USD 652,000). In 2006, the GOCR hopes to maintain a balance between emergency relief and attending to existing or "forgotten" crises, such as sub-Saharan Africa. While the overall size of Czech humanitarian assistance is quite modest, the GOCR is an emerging donor that is becoming more and more active in the international arena. And its small size also allows for greater flexibility and speedy disbursement, as we saw in the case of Czech contribution for Hurricane Katrina relief in the U.S. -- the largest contribution among the Visegrad-4 and the first pick-up point for the first-ever NATO humanitarian assistance flights. Reftel cable series discuss GOCR democracy promotion efforts around the world. Post will report via septels GOCR medical assistance to Iraqi and Pakistani children and GOCR Official Development Assistance (ODA) figures. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

¶2. Econoff met with Jiri Slavik of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of Development Cooperation to review 2005 humanitarian assistance projects and priorities for 2006. Mr. Slavik is the GOCR representative to the European Commission's Humanitarian Assistance Committee (HAC), which meets once a month in Brussels. Slavik explained that humanitarian assistance is a line item in the annual government budget, with USD 2.4 million budgeted for 2005 and USD 2.7 million for 2006. The figure most often cited for Czech humanitarian assistance in 2005 is USD 6.6 million (the budgeted USD 2.4 million plus four emergency relief projects worth USD 4.2 million), which was distributed among 16 different projects.

¶3. In addition to the USD 6.6 million disbursed by the MFA, other ministries also provided humanitarian assistance in ¶2005. The Ministry of Defense spent about USD 1.5 million on Pakistan earthquake relief (USD 625,000 to send doctors to a Dutch hospital in Pakistan and USD 835,000 on NATO flights) and the Ministry of the Interior spent USD 417,000 on medevacs from Pakistan. Therefore, the 2005 Czech humanitarian assistance figure is really around the USD 8.5 million. In addition to humanitarian assistance, the Ministry of Industry and Trade also spent USD 8.3 million on Iraq reconstruction projects involving private sector companies.

14. In 2006, the MFA hopes to reach a 65/35 balance between emergency relief projects and long-running crises. While much of the humanitarian assistance will depend on emerging crises around the world, thus far the GOCR plans to focus on the "forgotten crisis" of sub-Saharan Africa and on avian flu outbreaks. At the recent Afghanistan Donors Conference in London, the GOCR announced over USD 1 million (CZK 25 million) to support Czech NGOs, demining projects, and UN activities in Afghanistan.

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